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AUTHOR Mulkey, David
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ABSTRACT

The problem of rural education, specifically in the south, is not a single problem, but a set of related problems. This paper summarizes the historical perspective of education's importance in the rural South and the attitudes of the general populace. Illiteracy, dropout rates, and the need to retrain workers losing jobs in agriculture and traditional manufacturing are major issues to be addressed in policy making. Also presented here are those aspects of health care, nutrition, and family economic status negatively influencing educational achievement. Issues of racial and sexual inequality are examined in relation to situations inhibiting learning and personal development. A significant factor contributing to the lack of quality rural education is the reluctance of rural educational systems to educate residents who will migrate to urban areas for employment. A need exists for educational programs specifically targeting rural areas and addressing rural problems. Considerations of equity provide an argument for federal funding of compensatory human capital development and educational opportunities. Considerations are offered in this paper for options for federal educational funding policies. This paper contains 35 references. (ALL)

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EDUCATION POLICY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE SOUTHERN REGION

By

David Mulkey
University of Florida

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INTRODUCTION

Questions related to education and training programs and their role in economic development have received increasing attention in the South in recent years. A series of reports from the Southern Growth Policies Board (**Shadows in the Sunbelt, Rural Flight/Urban Might, Halfway Home and a Long Way to Go,** and **After the Factories**) along with papers by several other authors (Mulkey and Henry, 1988; Henry, 1987; Beaulieu, 1988; Billings, 1988; and Rosenfeld, 1988) remind us of sweeping changes occurring in the rural South. At the same time, these and other authors remind us of the increasing importance of an educated, skilled workforce in the future (Hobbs, 1987; Ross and Rosenfeld, 1987; Rosenfeld, 1987; Hobbs, 1988; Deaton and Deaton, 1988). The same set of authors generally conclude that education and skill levels in the rural South compare unfavorably with others areas of the nation and with metropolitan areas of the South.

With the considerations mentioned above in mind, this paper attempts to provide a regional prospective on the question of education policy and rural development issues. The following section sets the stage for the policy discussion by reviewing many of the writings relevant to the South and to human capital considerations in the region. An attempt is made to summarize those points which make the South unique as a region. Another section provides a brief historical perspective on education policy in the region. The final section examines the rationale for federal involvement in education policy and presents policy options for consideration.

EDUCATION IN THE RURAL SOUTH: SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER

As noted, questions related to education and training and general questions of economic development have received a great deal of attention in the South in recent years. These writings, when taken together, offer several important points which must be considered in addressing educational policy issues in the rural South. A summary of the more important

points are offered here as a way of setting the stage for a later discussion of education policy options.

1. The problem of education in rural areas is not a single problem. Rather, it is a set of related problems involving public expenditures, educational finance, non-governmental resources, and interrelationships between the public and private sectors. Policymakers face a set of separate, but related symptomatic conditions. Perhaps, the most straightforward one, and the one receiving the most attention, is the question of educational quality for students enrolled in primary and secondary educational institutions. Here the rural South is not unique, but is a part of a broader national concern over the state of the public schools and student achievement. But, in addition to questions of quality in existing schools, there are perplexing numbers of school dropouts, widespread functional illiteracy among adults, and a need for retraining of workers losing jobs in traditional manufacturing, agricultural, and natural resource based industries. The latter is particularly important due to the concentration of low-wage manufacturing industry in the South and declines in that employment, especially in the eight states of the central South (Mulkey and Henry, 1988; Henry, 1987). For example, Ross and Rosenfeld (1987) report that about half of southern nonmetropolitan counties lost manufacturing employment between 1977 and 1982. Further, evidence suggests that problems of high school dropouts, functional illiteracy, and general educational attainment are more severe in the rural South (Swanson, 1988; Beaulieu, 1988). Finally, as Deaton and Deaton (1988) note there is the need to consider education as a lifelong learning process with the associated need to provide learning opportunities to all age groups.

2. Problems of education and resulting public policies regardless of their focus cannot be treated separately from the context of community institutions of which they are a part. Learning does not take place in isolation (Deaton, 1983; Hobbs, 1987; Deaton and Deaton, 1988). Eduction policy in the rural South must consider the particular heritage of cultural,

social, and economic institutions which to a large extent still shape attitudes towards education in rural areas of the South. Early southern institutions were profoundly influenced by the existence of slavery, and many of the same attitudes were continued as the South progressed to tenant farming and a later transformation to low-wage manufacturing (Wilson and Sullivan, 1984; Goldfield, 1986; Daniel, 1986; Billings, 1988; Wright, 1987). There are notable exceptions, but much of the rural South has a long history of an institutional environment which places little value on education, especially widespread education for all its citizens.

3. Questions of educational attainment, educational policy, and economic development cannot be considered separately from each other or separately from other factors which affect the educational environment. Problems of inadequate health care and nutrition, poverty, and inequality all interfere with access to educational programs and impede the performance of large groups of individuals (Commission on the Future of the South, 1986; Ross and Rosenfeld, 1987; Deaton and Deaton, 1988). Hobbs (1987) makes the point that from available research, "It is clear that students from wealthier families and communities do better in school and after graduation than do students from poorer communities/families regardless of the quality of the school." He continues to note that rural areas have a higher proportion of low income people and concludes that, "The effect of poverty and other community and family factors can easily outweigh any institutional improvement in the schools." This is not to imply that quality schools are not a worthwhile goal, but to point out that in many rural areas other community/family considerations may represent the more important concerns. This point is of particular significance in the rural South. Swanson (1988) cites several studies by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to indicate that both the rate and number of rural people in poverty has increased since the late 1970's and that the rural poor are concentrated in the South (a rate of over 20 percent in the rural South compared to 16 percent in other rural areas). Swanson also notes that of the 231 Persistently Low Income Counties identified by

USDA, all except 18 (92 percent) are located in the rural South. In short as Deaton and Deaton (1988) and the report of the Committee on Human Resource Development of the 1986 Commission on the Future of the South stress, the problems of human capital in the South will require solutions extending beyond reform of public educational systems. The Committee's report concludes:

> Raising levels of education, which is certainly one of the strongest public goals in the South today, will not reach fruition without looking beyond the doors of the public schools and acting on those conditions that impede the acquisition of knowledge. By expanding human resource development beyond its traditional educational framework, the Committee acknowledges the connection between education and training and the other facets which affect the quality of the region's human resources.

4. Education policy and economic development in the rural South cannot be separated from issues of racial and sexual inequality. Counties in the rural South with predominantly black populations consistently exhibit lower levels of economic performance than do other rural counties in the region. Further, on most measures of educational attainment, blacks usually compare unfavorably to other racial groups. The same general conclusions can be reached relative to the incidence of poverty among female headed households(Swanson, 1988; Beaulieu, 1988; Johnson, 1986). Johnson (p.18) offers the following sobering comparisons relative to the rural South.

--In the South: 36 percent of female-headed households were poor in 1983.

--In the rural South: the figure rises to 39.2 percent

--For black rural women in the South more than 58 percent were poor in 1983.

--For children in the South, under eighteen and living in female-headed households: 62 percent were poor in 1983.

--For black children in these homes: the figure is 69 percent.

--For rural children: 61.5 percent are poor.

--For rural black children: 75.7 percent are poor.

--For all rural children under six in a female-headed household: 70.3 percent are poor.

--For rural black children under six: 80 percent live in poverty.

Thus, as these brief comparisons stress, the high incidence of poverty among rural blacks and among female-headed households of all races place large numbers of children and adults in situations known to inhibit learning and personal development. The rural South is unique in terms of the proportion of its citizens falling into the "at risk" categories.

5. Unlike investments in immobile kinds of infrastructure, educated workers are more highly mobile and more likely to leave the community after completing their education. The more rural the community, the more likely this out migration becomes. Thus, education policy must take account of the fact that the public benefits to education are much less likely to accrue to a local area than are benefits associated with other types of community investment, and as a result, local communities may be less likely to support public education (Deaton and McNamara, 1984; Hobbs, 1987; Hobbs, 1988; Carlin and Ross, 1987; Chicoine and Ward, 1988).

Further, due to considerations of location, resource availability, and other factors, it is unlikely that significant job creation will take place in all rural communities (Johnson, 1986; Mulkey and Henry, 1988). Finally, urban areas with their wider array of economic and social opportunities will continue to remain attractive to rural youth (Swanson and Butler, 1987). In this vein, McGranahan (1988) notes that, "Within production industries, rural areas specialize in production jobs, while professional, research, and management jobs are more often located in cities." Thus, for a variety of reasons, better educated rural residents are likely to be attracted to urban areas. Local educational systems are faced with preparing residents for employment in urban centers when the movement of those residents will actually have detrimental effects on the local community. Again, the relevant point is that educational benefits are not going to be captured directly in many rural communities. The existence of these non-local benefits provides a rationale for non-local involvement in the provision and financing of educational programs. This point is particularly relevant as federal involvement is considered, and especially important for the rural South. Rural areas in the region have a

long history of outmigration, and metropolitan areas such as Atlanta continue to outperform rural areas in the provision of jobs and economic opportunity.

6. A significant problem exists relative to addressing specific programs to improve educational quality. There has been some research on the subject, but significant theoretical and measurement problems remain (Deaton and McNamara, 1984; McCrakin, 84; Clouser and Debertin, 1988). There are relationships between teacher quality and student achievement, between school expenditures and student achievement, and between education and economic development (Deaton and McNamara, 1984; Skees and Swanson, 1988). However, there is little evidence to suggest the length of the lag period associated with improvements in teacher quality, there are methodological and measurement problems with much of the research, and the total amount of research is insufficient to provide a strong empirical foundation for firm conclusions. Thus, it is difficult to suggest how educational dollars within a school system may be reallocated or how new dollars should be expended so as to improve the quality of education. Further, there is even less in the way of a solid research foundation for considering the allocation of public funds among specific education investments and economic growth in a community (McNamara and Deaton, 1988). Included are programs dealing with literacy training, worker retraining, relocation assistance, and a variety of other educational programs. All contribute in different ways over different periods of time to the existing stock of educated and skilled individuals in a community.

Finally, it is important to note that the lack of educated and skilled people in a community may not reflect on the quality of existing educational and training systems. It may instead reflect a set of factors which make the community an unattractive place to live, or alternatively, it may reflect the prevalence of conditions such as inequality, poverty, and health care which interfere with either access to or performance in existing programs.

EDUCATION POLICY AND RURAL AREAS IN THE SOUTH

Education policy as it impacts rural areas in the South, notwithstanding the fact that the public school movement developed somewhat later than in the rest of the country due to the existence of slavery and associated attitudes of education for the privledged (Nalor and Clotfelter, 1975), exhibits many of the same themes evident in rural areas nationally. Dominant themes include consolidation and changes in school financing and, in the South, racial integration. Education, once primarily a local function, shifted to more of a state function and consolidation resulted in rural schools modeled more along the lines of their urban counterparts (Deaton and McNamara, 1984; Hobbs, 1987; Sher and Tompkins, 1977; Rosenfeld and Sher, 1977).

The trend towards state government providing a larger share of educational funding is more pronounced in the South. Typically, state aid is provided to local school districts on a per pupil basis with certain minimum standards then mandated by the state with various considerations to ensure more equal funding across districts (Clouser and Debertin, 1988; Chicoine and Ward, 1988). Chicoine and Ward present data that allow some initial comparisons across states (Table 1, p 11). For all states, the state average contribution to education in 1987 amounted to 53.6 percent of school expenditures. In the Southeast and Southwest, only Virginia (36.7 percent) and Texas (49.7 percent) were below the national average. State contributions in other southern states ranged from 56.2 percent (Tennessee) up to 79.9 percent (Alabama). The regional average for the Southeast was 63.5 percent. At the same time per pupil expenditures in Southern states with the exception of Florida ($4163) were below the national average ($4043) in 1987. Four states (Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee) had per pupil expenditures of less than $3000. With reference to the Southeast, Chicoine and Ward (1988) conclude,

> School funding in the Southeast is characterized by extreme variation, but most states have the lowest per pupil revenues and the most state dominated finance systems among all regions; several states have below average school spending burdens and steady or declining state share of state/local revenues.

> Schools in this region have little financial independence suggesting the low level of school revenues is a function of state not local preferences and policies. This is a region where discussion of education reform in the 1980s has been very strong, but where dollars to support reform have been elusive (p. 16).

Finally, in the South as elsewhere, with the exception of training in vocational agriculture, there has been a general lack of rural considerations in educational programs at the state level. Emphasis through school consolidation has been on the creation of comprehensive schools modeled along the lines of schools in urban areas (Rosenfeld and Sher, 1977; Sher and Thompkins, 1977).

Aside from funding for vocational education, the federal government played no significant role in the funding of public education at the elementary and secondary level until the mid-1960's with the advent of the federal poverty programs. Since that time the federal government has provided funds for compensatory education programs for lower income individuals. However, federal involvement has never amounted to more than 10 percent of total educational funding and currently averages about 6 percent (Chicoine and Ward, 1988; Ross and Rosenfeld, 1987). There is no federal support for general education at the elementary and secondary level (Clouser and Debertin, 1988). Further, there is no provision of federal education funding which specifically targets rural areas. Such areas benefit more or less depending on the proportion of low income residents relative to other areas. Ross and Rosenfeld report that rural areas have tended to benefit slightly more from federal compensatory education programs due to the higher proportion of low income people, but the variation, on average, amounts to only $3 per pupil.

For vocational education, federal involvement and funding support has a longer history in rural areas due to the early funding support of vocational agricultural programs. However, this amounts to another example of federal funding being relatively small compared to the total cost of program funding. Rosenfeld (1987) notes that the total federal commitment represents less than 10 percent of the total cost, although he recognizes the difficulty in

arriving at definitive answers due to inadequate data. Ross and Rosenfeld draw essentially the same conclusion relative to federal support for 2-year colleges. Again, none of the programs have provisions which specially target rural areas. Ross and Rosenfeld also examine other federal job training programs with similar conclusions. Programs offer little in the way of specifically targeting rural areas, and they conclude, "Education and training programs have made modest differences in the lives of some rural residents, but the evidence remains that they have not eliminated, or even substantially reduced, poverty among rural families."

In short, education has for the most part been a function of state and local government with a relatively minor role played by federal funding. In existing federal programs there has been no attempt to target federal programs to rural areas. The same is generally true of state funding for education programs. Only one state in the South, Oklahoma, is reported to have a rural section within the state department of education (Rosenfeld, 1987). Chicoine and Ward (1988) report that several states around the nation do target additional funds to small, rural schools, but that the amount of funds actually transferred is small.

POLICY OPTIONS

In the area of education different policy options exist at the community, state, and federal levels of government. However, since the emphasis of this conference is on federal policy, any consideration of policy options should begin with the rationale for federal involvement. At least three points are worthy of consideration in this regard. Simple considerations of fairness (equity)--ensuring equal opportunity for all-- provide an argument for federal involvement in the provision of human capital development/educational programs in rural areas. This represents the historical motive behind federal funding of compensatory educational programs and other individual/family support programs. Certainly the evidence would suggest that programs supported on this motivation should be continued or increased. Further, given evidence regarding the current situation for rural areas in general and the

rural South in particular, combined with the problems of isolation and lack of economic opportunity, the equity argument can be extended to support programs which provide differential consideration for educational programs in rural areas.

Federal involvement is also supported to the extent that either "rural development" or "rural transition" represents a national objective. Henry et al. (1986) and Drabenstott et al. (1986) note that market forces are working to transfer resources out of rural America and argue that the rural policy choice is between programs to facilitate the transition and development programs designed to overcome and reverse market forces. In either case, however, the existence of an educated, skilled and flexible work force is critical to the success of the policies. Thus, if the federal government has a set of rural objectives, quality educational systems are crucial to accomplishing those objectives.

Finally, the most neglected reason for federal commitment to education and training relates to the fact that part of the benefits from educational investments accrue to society at large and are not realized at the community or even state level. An explicit recognition of this fact in federal policy debates could lead to a greatly expanded federal role in the support of education.

What then are the policy options open to the federal government if a choice is made to support education in rural areas? The following are offered for consideration.

1. Consider federal funding support for general education on the grounds that some part of the social returns to education represent a national benefit not captured at the local/state level. Funds could be used to supplement local and state expenditures on a per pupil basis, or as Clouser and Debertin (1988) suggest, funding could be provided to support certain programs deemed to be more in the national interest.

2. Consider federal funding support targeted to rural schools. Such schools tend to be smaller than their urban counterparts and more isolated. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that educational program delivery involves higher costs in rural areas. Federal support could help

to ensure equal educational opportunities for rural students.

3. Provide federal support for the development of innovative programs and the application of new technologies in the delivery of educational programs in rural areas. Several ideas are available for consideration. For example, Hobbs (1987) notes the possibility of using technology to offset the problems of small student numbers and isolation in many rural schools. Clouser and Debertin (1988) and Deaton and McNamara (1984) note the labor intensive nature of the educational process and raise the question of using technology to improve productivity. Rosenfeld (1987) provides suggestions for the development of vocational programs modeled after the early programs in vocational agriculture which went beyond job specific skills training and developed leadership and entrepreneurial abilities. Deaton (1983) provides examples of exemplary school programs, and Nachtigal (1983) devotes a volume to examining various innovative efforts to improve rural education. Good ideas seem much more abundant that commitments to improvement as measured in educational funding dollars.

4. Develop programs to increase public awareness of educational problems and needs at the local level. Education is not simply the responsibility of the school system, and successful programs must rely on family and community involvement for success. Further, with widespread support at the local level regional and state concerns over education needs could be more easily translated into funding dollars. This could be accomplished through the use of existing agencies such as the Cooperative Extension Service, Community Colleges, and public school systems. These agencies could be instrumental in developing not only increased awareness but also in providing leadership in developing and implementing local education programs.

5. Increased funding for research to provide empirical evidence upon which to base the development and funding of education and training programs in rural areas. Information is needed on measures of educational quality and the factors

which contribute to quality; information is needed on the relationships between specific educational investments and changes in community economic factors; information is needed on the returns to investments in specific educational programs (science, math, reading etc.) as opposed to general returns to education; information is needed on the magnitude of the benefits to educational investments which are not captured directly by communities and states; and finally, information is needed on the interrelationships between community attributes and successful educational programs.

6. Provide federal leadership and support to develop a systematic approach to dealing with the range of educational problem in rural areas, including not just problems with public schools, but also worker retraining, adult illiteracy, and the need for life long educational opportunities for adults. A federal task force, a national conference, or a series of regional conferences could provide the catalyst for legislative action.

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